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# Chapter 11

## Community Partnership Through Transformative Justice: The Healing Garden Project at the Oregon State Penitentiary

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### ABSTRACT

*In the Foreword to Gerard Robinson and Elizabeth English Smith's Education for Liberation volume on educational initiatives in prison, Newt Gingrich and Van Jones note that educational programs "do something powerful: they give hope and dignity to the incarcerated." The authors wholeheartedly agree and while they recognize the importance of higher education programs that confer degrees and therefore credentials out in the free world, they find that education can be broadly understood in prison in ways that greatly enhance the hope and dignity of the incarcerated. In this chapter, they explore the creation of a Japanese-style healing garden at the Oregon State Penitentiary (OSP), a maximum security, 2,000-person male prison in Salem, Oregon. This prisoner-led initiative was a resounding success, despite all the odds against it, because it was animated by a philosophy of transformative justice that both prison administration and prisoners could believe in, and it embraced the need for meaningful and inclusive community partnerships.*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3056-6.ch011

*Community Partnership Through Transformative Justice*

## INTRODUCTION

*If what we were doing in the past was working, we wouldn't be building more prisons.*  
– Brandon Kelly, Superintendent of Oregon State Penitentiary<sup>1</sup>

In the Forward to an edited volume on educational initiatives in prison, an unlikely duo, Newt Gingrich and Van Jones, note that educational programs “do something powerful: they give hope and dignity to the incarcerated” (Gingrich & Jones, 2019). Gingrich’s embrace of criminal justice reform is a startling turnaround from his position in the early 1990s when, as Speaker of the House, he championed longer prison sentences, tough on crime measures, and increased funding to build state prisons. The partnership of Jones and Gingrich demonstrates the bipartisan support for reforming the prison system. We wholeheartedly agree with their focus on “hope and dignity” for the incarcerated and the role of education in both. While we recognize the importance of higher education programs that confer degrees and therefore credentials out in the free world, we find that education can be broadly understood in prison in ways that greatly enhance that hope and dignity. In this chapter, we explore the creation of a Japanese-style healing garden at the Oregon State Penitentiary (OSP), a maximum security, 2,000 person male prison in Salem, Oregon. This resident-led initiative was a resounding success, despite all the odds against it, because it was animated by a philosophy of transformative justice that grew from education classes focused on alternative conceptions of criminal justice. This alternative philosophy was fostered in classes that brought outside college students into prison to explore the causes and consequences of mass incarceration and what to do about it. Both prison administration and incarcerated people embraced the need for alternatives to the punitive prison system. Meaningful and inclusive community partnerships made the garden possible by generating positive attention to the project and through fundraising of both in-kind and monetary donations. Successful completion of this extraordinary garden was the culmination of many years of work. While the garden itself delivers therapeutic benefits from exposure to nature, as well as educational benefits around horticulture and construction, the process to get there required extensive project management and grant-writing, bureaucratic navigation and problem-solving. The larger project gave incarcerated men a sense of purpose, and validated their ability to do good works and to succeed.

Johnny Cofer, an incarcerated person with a Life sentence, did not participate in a degree program but he did take a Restorative Justice class that encourages men to be accountable for the harms they have committed and to find ways to make amends. Professor Nathlene Frener ends every class with the mantra: “Once you know, you owe.” The class inspires men on the inside to look for ways to apply their new knowledge, improve their lives, and better their world however they can.

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Since Cofer does not have a release date, he turned his attention to influencing the prison environment itself. OSP is Oregon's oldest prison; it just turned 150 years old. The buildings are in a great deal of disrepair, and the cell blocks are five tiers of traditional 5x8 feet cells made from cinder blocks with metal bars. The bottom three tiers are double bunked. The top two are not because it would not be structurally sound. The larger prison campus has a number of buildings—an industrial laundry where many men work, a furniture factory, a couple of segregated housing units, including death row. There is a yard with a track and grass on the inside but when Cofer looked around 5 years ago, he mostly saw barbed wire and concrete. He decided he really wanted to build a garden with a koi pond. This was how he wanted to give back and improve the prison environment.

The koi pond idea expanded into a Japanese-style Healing Garden designed by Hoichi Kurisu and built under his guidance primarily by people who are incarcerated. The project was spearheaded by the Asian Pacific Family Club (APFC), a culture club sanctioned by the prison with 150 members who are racially and ethnically diverse. It was supported by an administration that had begun to understand that punishment alone does not bring about reformation or help with high recidivism rates. Finally, it was financed with community support. The APFC worked with a variety of community members who raised funds for the project and supported their efforts on the inside and out, as well as a handful of foundations who provided substantial grants. In all, the men raised over \$400,000 for the Healing Garden and built broad-based community support for the effort. The result is not just an extraordinarily beautiful garden but a new vision of what incarcerated people can achieve if given the opportunity. Further, we believe that the garden is just the beginning of a broader educational effort at OSP to address trauma and teach skills of mindfulness that lead to healing and growth. In short, the Healing Garden project is what happens when transformative justice is taken seriously inside prison.

### **The Role of Transformative Justice**

Transformative Justice is a philosophical approach to crime and violence that seeks to repair individuals and communities, not merely punish people for crimes. Transformative justice is an understanding that our current criminal justice system is failing because at its core, it operates on the idea that deprivation and punishment deter crime and does not address the various sources of crime. Nowhere is the failure of our criminal justice system more evident than in our recidivism rate. In a recent 9-year study of released formerly incarcerated persons, Alper et al. (2018) found that about “68% of released prisoners [sic] were arrested in 3 years, 79% within 6 years, and 83% within 9 years.” A more successful approach would address both mass incarceration and violence in our communities. While a more comprehensive

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approach to this problem would involve not just criminal justice practices but also systemic treatment of poverty and mental health resources, reform of our punishment system remains essential.

Although the national rate of violent crime has decreased significantly since 1993 (Gramlich, 2019), childhood exposure to violence is still very high (Finkelhor et al., 2015). Further, poor and racially segregated communities experience disproportionate levels of violence (Sackett, 2016). Addressing violence in our communities is crucial, but as Sered (2018) successfully argues, “[w]e cannot incarcerate our way out of violence” (p. 157). As they are currently constructed, prisons are a limited means for ensuring safety because the four core causes of violence (shame, isolation, exposure to violence, and economic need) are all made worse by incarceration (Sered, 2018, p. 169). Importantly, subjecting persons who are incarcerated to unjust living conditions, including regular humiliation and assault, substandard food and restricted family interaction, produces anger that “can overfill the psychological space where reflection and self-searching might occur” (Larson, 2013). In comparing the experiences of American people in custody in a writing workshop with incarcerated persons from Norway, Larson finds that people’s sense of remorse (while in American prisons) is constantly at battle with the arbitrary and inhumane treatment they experience in prison (Larson, 2013). The kind of accountability necessary to bring about transformation and true desistance from violent behavior is difficult to foster in environments where violence or the threat of violence is continually perpetrated.

Even in “progressive” prisons that provide some educational opportunities and other pro-social programming, the use of solitary confinement is rampant. The Vera Institute found overuse of segregated housing in Oregon’s prisons primarily for non-violent rule violations (Hastings, 2016, p. 3). Since 7.5% of Oregon’s prison population was housed in segregation, there actually are not enough non-segregated housing options to empty segregated units. In other words, the use (and overuse) of solitary confinement is required for the Oregon Department of Corrections (ODOC) to have enough beds for all people who are incarcerated. Removal to the Disciplinary Segregation Unit (DSU) means that an incarcerated person is stripped of his prison blues, made to wear an orange jumpsuit and placed in a separate building with extremely limited freedom of movement. As the Vera Institute found, “Adults in custody in DSU spend 23 hours a day, on average, in conditions marked by isolation, idleness, and sensory deprivation” (Hastings, 2016, p. 26). Adults in segregated custody are often given very little of their property and access to outside family and friends is severely limited. Finally, “solitary confinement” does not necessarily mean you are alone. AICs can be housed with another person in the 5’x 8’ windowless cell. When people who are incarcerated are subject to such arbitrary and inhumane treatment, when they are often the victims themselves of crime or of childhood trauma, not only is their treatment the opposite of justice, it can be hard for them

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to stay motivated to change long-standing destructive behaviors. The world seems set against them and the possibility of a better life hopeless.

Transformative Justice brings five fundamental insights to the work of prison reform and anti-violence work. First, transformative justice affirms the worth and dignity of every human being, believing that no one is expendable, certainly not whole populations—the poor and people of color who are over-represented in our prisons. Men convicted of a range of violent crimes can also be incredible artists, devoted sons, loving fathers, talented poets and performers, philosophers, small business entrepreneurs, musicians and song-writers, hospice workers, mentors, fundraisers for hurricane relief, proud uncles, and visionaries for peace. Second, transformative justice demands accountability for the harms that have been generated. That accountability cannot happen if offenders are not given the space and skills to develop empathy and connection. Third, transformative justice requires inviting a variety of participants into the work of transformation. As a practical matter, community involvement facilitates a sense of belonging, the sense of connection that is so essential to real accountability. Fourth, transformative justice understands that healing for both individuals and communities requires creating opportunities for offenders to make amends for the harms they have caused and to pursue lives of meaning and purpose. Finally, the goal of transformative justice needs to include “repairing harm in relationships and changing systems that cause harm” (Transformative Justice Program 2019). These two movements – for both better relationships and better communities – are intrinsically linked to the process of transformation. The Healing Garden embodies these elements of transformative justice, making it a compelling project for emulation.

### **The Healing Garden as Transformative Justice**

The Healing Garden effort was inspired by the creation of a veteran’s memorial at OSP in May 2014. The veteran’s project raised \$8,500 from incarcerated individuals and outside veteran’s groups, brought together both prison residents and prison staff, and represented, as one commentator noted, “a shining testament to what a small group of adults in custody can do when prison administrators take a leap of faith for them” (Currie, 2014). The idea that incarcerated persons could work together with community groups to honor fallen veterans was an early model for the Healing Garden project. That effort paved the way for the much more ambitious garden project and provided mentors for members of the APFC who sought to build the garden.

Led by President Toshio Takanobu, the APFC reached out to fellow incarcerated person, Kevin O’Hara, President of the Veteran’s Club, to learn how they were able to get approval for the project and conduct fundraisers for it. The fact that OSP has administration sanctioned clubs which hold elections for offices and are allowed

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to fundraise for programming and other projects was the result of agitation and protest in the late 1960s. The clubs teach a variety of skills, including financial management, public speaking and project planning. Importantly, the clubs also hold events that allow them to bring community members inside of prison walls, not for the purpose of friend and family visiting but for cultural celebrations, musical performances, or expert consultation. The Veteran's club enthusiastically endorsed the Healing Garden project, offering their expertise about navigating bureaucratic obstacles as well as encouragement. This first alliance, between the veteran's group and APFC was noteworthy, not only for its level of friendship and camaraderie, but because the veteran's group is composed predominately of white adults in custody and the APFC is made up overwhelmingly of Asians and Pacific Islanders with strong cultural identities in Asian traditions. The APFC would ultimately build an ethnically diverse coalition of supporters for the Healing Garden, avoiding the usual politics of jealousy and racial division that historically occurred whenever one group received more resources than another.

The APFC leaders worked hard to live their motto, "diminishing boundaries and overcoming differences." They insisted that the Healing Garden had to be for all people housed at OSP and for staff, something that could unite people of all races and backgrounds and would embrace their shared humanity. In that spirit, the APFC men also made sure that opportunities to work in creating the garden were shared across clubs, races, and incentive levels. Anyone willing to put in the time and effort was welcomed to participate. The garden itself is designed to encourage people who enter it to embrace a sense of humility and common condition by bending low through the gate to enter the garden. It is designed to put visitors in a place of contemplation about our place in the cosmos.

What initially started as a desire to beautify their surroundings, the garden effort began to take on a more profound purpose and meaning. The executive team for the garden reported being changed by the experience. In an interview with the authors, APFC President Takanobu discussed how his educational experiences helped to prepare him for broader community leadership. He explained that when he first attended classes with other college students, he worried that he did not have anything to contribute. In prison, he said he had "become the person other people thought I was" and had been coached in the "prison mentality." His classes made him socialize with people who were not incarcerated and to think increasingly of life outside of prison. After the class was over, he began to volunteer his time with the APFC and began to connect to his culture and to think in terms of the collective good. He confronted the shame he felt about being in prison and decided to take on more club responsibility. As APFC President, Takanobu has had to be accountable for finances and responsible to the larger membership to deliver the results he promised. Although being club president has felt like a great deal of pressure, it put

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him in the role of helping others, being supportive and encouraging of others and their ideas. Takanobu reported that the “Garden has been a positive light,” one that made him “hungry to learn” and “hungry to make a difference.” Confronting the myriad changes the extensive project demanded, Takanobu learned that failures are just part of the learning process and “we should never give up on ourselves.” This newfound confidence meant that Takanobu felt he was a valuable person to both inside and outside communities (Takanobu, 2020).

James Clark, also an APFC member, recalled when he came to OSP as a young person he was saddled with shame, guilt and hopelessness and only possessed an eighth-grade education. He, too, started taking Restorative Justice classes. He felt an enormous responsibility to pay back the social debts he had created. He first got involved in the garden project just to help his friend but his work building the garden transformed into more. He felt part of something larger; he felt a great unity with the other men—men of all different age groups and ethnicities. The sense of community felt like a reprieve from prison life and prison segregation. Clark explained that through the work on the garden, he feels like a better person because: “I came to see this whole place as my community” (Clark, 2020).

Increasingly, the men who worked on this project saw their participation as a means of redemption, to make some amends for the harms they had committed and to contribute positively to their environment. As Cofer wrote:

*There are so many social divisions within a prison: race, age, gang affiliations, as well as inmate vs. staff. But we are all human, and we all need healing for our wounds and traumas. The garden can also serve as a place to consider our own accountability for the harms we may have caused to others, and how we wish to move forward, making amends as necessary and where possible, and contemplating who we want to be as we step into our future (Cofer, 2019).*

As their vision of a beautiful garden became a reality, success bred a newfound confidence and increased gratitude for the connections with others. The project gave meaning to their endeavors and resulted in the creation of a broader community, both inside and outside of prison. They literally felt that they were being transformed as they were transforming their prison environment. Transformation is not limited to becoming a better person. Prison culture may cause emotional shutdown, but Cofer stated that the Healing Garden Project started to allow the incarcerated to share their emotions, ground them, and develop a sense of teamwork. The Garden, Cofer explained, “taught me to love myself, not doubt myself, that I can be effective in a positive way” (Cofer, 2020). The project, the support it received, and the practice of building it inspired a sense of awe, a rare commodity in prison. This transformation would not have been possible without: 1) institutional receptivity to the broader



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project of transformative justice; or 2) the development of both individual and organizational relationships that supported the work.

## **INSTITUTIONAL RECEPTIVITY**

### **Leadership and Climate**

The Healing Garden Project would have been squashed early in the vision stage if there had not been a receptive climate for innovation, starting with the OSP prison leadership. Prison climate is correlated with the type of leadership and can change greatly based on leadership style (Lindemuth, 2007). Although community partnerships are well recognized, putting such partnerships in practice is rather complicated. Lerner (2016) notes that such partnerships must maintain order, avoid any disruption their daily operations, and ensure safety for community partners. She states that “considerable investment of time and commitment” are required by the facility to generate safe and continuous access of community partners. Therefore, organizational goals, visions, and leadership are essential for successful prison-community collaboration.

The Healing Garden Project was a resident-led initiative that required careful planning, long-term vision, and strong commitment from the institution. The project began under one superintendent and finished under another, surviving the transition in leadership. In fact, the project was first formulated because Superintendent Premo asked the people incarcerated at OSP if they had ideas for making the 150-year old prison look nicer. When Superintendent Kelly took over the position, it was not clear that he would continue the more open and “transformational leadership” of his predecessor (Seiter, 2017, p. 345), which had everyone motivated for the better and working on identified problems together. Although Superintendent Kelly has a more brusque style, he emphasizes humanizing AICs and normalizing their life. A trip to Norway in the fall of 2018 helped to cement his vision for purposeful change. In the Norway ideal, people who are convicted of crimes are deprived of their liberty, but no more than that. Although control is required to some extent for security purposes, Norway’s approach is to build the capacity of people who are incarcerated, not keep them powerless. Adults in custody generally report that Kelly is fair, cares about the bottom line, and will listen to new ideas.

The desire to do corrections differently is encouraged by state level leadership. The current Director of the Oregon Department of Corrections, Colette Peters, has shifted the view of corrections from retribution to true and practical rehabilitation and even envisions reforming the prison system drastically based on the Norwegian correctional philosophy (Stevens, 2019). Oregon was selected as one of a handful

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of states by the U.S.-European Criminal Justice Innovation Program, funded by the Prison Law Office and developed in partnership with the UC Criminal Justice and Health Consortium at UC San Francisco, to send delegates to visit prisons in Norway. Peters, along with three other leaders in DOC, two state Senators, two state Representatives, and two leaders of the Criminal Justice Commission, visited six prisons and met with officials from a variety of European corrections systems (Peters & Schmidt, 2018). Recognizing that about 95% of the incarcerated individuals in Oregon will be released (Hughes & Wilson, n.d.), the group was receptive to the idea that more needs to be done to help people who were incarcerated successfully re-enter society and not return to prison. In Norway in the Fall of 2017, Peters learned of their focus on “normalization,” or creating relatively normal conditions in prison so that residents are treated with respect, and given meaningful opportunities for work, pro-social activities and growth. As one of the trip organizers explains, American officials who visit Norway are encouraged to “Ask your cab drivers, your waiters, ‘what is the point of the prison system?’ Everyone [in Norway] will say, ‘To make better neighbors’” (Chammah, 2017). While the international program has not always resulted in major reform in the states given both political and budgetary constraints, in Oregon, it has led to a new language and a new openness about what corrections can and should do.

“Openness” is the key for any resident-led activities, which can be viewed as a threat to security. Openness is essentially twofold: one is openness to incarcerated people’s autonomy and creativity, which empowers and motivates them to transform into engaged and productive citizens. The other aspect is being open to community involvement. When it comes to the Healing Garden Project, community support was crucial. Without community, especially, grassroot supporters, this project would not have been successful. As long as the current State leadership lasts, it is expected that prison climate will keep improving regardless of the security level or gender. However, before the project could get a green light from the administration, even an open administration, it had to contend with security demands.

### **Security Demands**

Despite the support for Norwegian style reforms at OSP and in the DOC corrections leadership, early blueprints for the Healing Garden Project were repeatedly rejected for security reasons—concerns about sight lines, places to hide contraband, and spaces for violent assault topped the list of issues security personnel raised over and over again. Contending with these concerns was an ongoing issue for the designer, Hoichi Kurisu, and for the incarcerated men. Resistance from the head of security was a constant issue and required extensive negotiation and education. The Japanese garden is an open-air space, but not too open. This type of garden is

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not for congregating and socializing with others; rather, it is used to meditate or see one's inner self surrounded by nature. The philosophy behind the Japanese garden is to coexist with nature, and to promote tranquility and harmony. Therefore, the garden is built on natural landscape which creates secluded and semi-private areas. Strolling paths are not straight; rather, narrow and windy paths are common in which views are blocked by trees, bushes, or boulders. Also, a Zen style ("*Karesansui*" – dry rock and gravel), pond and manmade small hills ("*Tsukiyama*") and Tea garden (Kyuhooshi, n.d.) are incorporated into the OSP healing garden. Such "little bit about everything" elements are necessary for meditation, reflection, and mental relaxation. These design features are a challenge for those concerned primarily with security at a maximum security facility like OSP.

One of the major concerns security personnel raised was the potential for fighting in a hidden space. Since views are blocked from other garden users and officers, they need to be prepared for possible victimization. Thus, who uses the garden and when is controlled to avoid any altercations. In addition to the problem of hidden areas, the natural environment can cause security concerns because of accessibility to "natural" weapons (Arimoto, 2020, p.60). Although no one can easily move boulders, the stones, branches, and water can be dangerous. Therefore, technological incident prevention such as hidden cameras were installed to satisfy those concerns, despite the fact that such features run counter to the Japanese garden philosophy.

Prison administrators worried about places where contraband can be hidden. They did not want the garden to become a tool for trafficking. There are many places small items can be hidden—behind the bushes, under the stones/benches, inside the soil, or even in the water (Arimoto, 2020, p. 60). Entry is closely supervised as a result and access is closely monitored. The incarcerated men and the designer worked to ensure all these concerns were met. Careful screening, planning, and adequate monitoring plans, in fact, continue to be addressed.

The whole purpose of this garden is to offer "relatively" quiet space away from the crowd—however, the garden is built in prison. Unlike the outside world, no complete privacy is granted. So, birds-eye cameras, population control, and presence of officers are required. In addition, the APFC or OSP must be clear about potential shut-down if an incident occurs. The APFC and involved supporters, including staff, hope garden users will not risk abusing the garden, yet, they have had to develop crisis (risk) management systems to contend with worst case scenarios. While frustrating, these measures have largely been accommodated in creative and compelling ways.

### **Relationships With Staff**

Each incarcerated person club is supervised by an "activities recreational specialist," who approves club activities, schedules meetings, and escorts visitors. These

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specialists also may attend fundraisers outside the walls, and serve as a middle person for prisoners and their supporters by facilitating communication. Basically, people who are incarcerated must closely work with the specialist and the relationship with that officer is crucial for club operations.

In the case of the Healing Garden Project, the APFC consults with the specialist about any activities. They regularly show their respect to her, and work to develop trust. On the other hand, the specialist understands the concept behind the garden, shows passion and support for this project, and enjoys working with the APFC members. This mutual relationship seems to be a key for success. As far as the authors observed, there is no hostility or tension between the two parties. Rather, the social distance between them has shrunk, and they work together as a team. Staffs' trust and willingness to help certainly empower people who are incarcerated to move forward. Despite such a supportive environment, incarcerated persons must endure practical challenges and inconvenience, such as delayed communication when their staff advisor is on vacation or out of the office. The assigned officer has sole responsibility for this project and no other officers can make decisions on her behalf.

Support comes not only from the direct supervisor, but has expanded to other specialists and general staff. Officers casually converse with the APFC members about their project and commented positively. A supportive environment generally exists at OSP; however, this is an earned condition. Any mistake or violation potentially removes some members from the project. Therefore, anyone who is involved is motivated to discipline himself in order not to jeopardize his privilege in being a part of this project. Many, though not all, members of the staff, appreciate the garden and the positive energy and attention it has received. Superintendent Kelly commented that for the first time, people in his community are showing interest in his work and what is happening at OSP.

### **Community Partnerships**

As Boghossian et al. (2012) suggest, the availability of prison resources and state economies cannot be discussed apart. Corrections are frequently under pressure to cut budgets and do more with less. Community partnerships have become a vital resource to a prison community (p. 30). The authors particularly discuss academic-prison partnership and how sustainable partnership can be developed despite a multitude of obstacles between the world of corrections and the world of academia.

Prior to the work on the Healing Garden, the men of the APFC had worked to foster community connections. Some of these efforts were more successful than others. For example, when the APFC raised money for a children's hospital in Portland, their donation was returned. But they did build good will donating to Tokyo International University of America after the Fukushima nuclear disaster to help

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students reconnect with their families and with local libraries and other non-profit organizations. Further, the APFC would often host cultural events, inviting Asian-American organizations, musicians and other performers to participate. The ability of the club to have outside contact was a crucial component of building support for the garden project. It was a connection with a local musician that enabled the men to meet renowned landscape architect Hoichi Kurisu.

Kurisu visited the men in prison and listened to their vision for a healing garden. Although the idea of building a Japanese style garden inside a prison was unprecedented, Kurisu felt the project was a natural extension of his work on the restorative and healing properties of his gardens. Kurisu International had created healing gardens at a community hospital in Lebanon, Oregon and a substance abuse recovery campus for teens; as their website explains:

*Our Japanese-style gardens are designed with an intention for restoration on the deepest levels. We incorporate the ancient philosophies and techniques of Japanese garden design to reawaken the connection between people and nature—between ourselves and the larger, timeless cycles of change and regeneration (Kurisu International).*

Kurisu's donation of the garden design was a tremendous boost to the project, but even more importantly, his expertise (and charismatic manner) convinced OSP administrators that this project was more than a pipe dream; it was a project that serious people would want to support. Kurisu's reputation, furthermore, was a catalyst for early funding from outside contributors.

The task of having to raise all the money from private sources was daunting. OSP would allow some special fundraisers inside OSP, as they had with the Veteran's Club, but the sticker price of the healing garden, originally projected to cost about \$100,000, would not be raised from a population that can only earn about \$1/hour or less. So, the men budgeted to raise \$10,000 from inside and looked outside for help for the rest. Their first presentation about the Healing Garden Project to an outside community member was to one of the authors. She forwarded information about the project to faculty members in the Asian Studies department who forwarded her email to their networks of Asian and Asian-American non-profits and other potentially interested individuals. That initial email yielded a \$10,000 donation from an interested philanthropist who was familiar with Kurisu's work. That first major donation was both a signal to the administration that the men might be capable of raising the money and it was a shot of confidence to the incarcerated population. Quickly, a core group of community members formed to support the project and hosted a series of educational forums and fundraisers. The fundraisers typically yielded relatively small donations from many individuals, often amounting to \$1-

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2,000. It quickly became clear that a project of this magnitude would need support from foundations.

The APFC cultivated friends and a sense of community among its supporters with invitations to meetings on the inside, frequent acknowledgement and recognition of the work being done on their behalf. They hosted appreciation banquets and gave community members artwork that they made on the inside, and they frequently connected people and organizations by being inclusive of anyone who expressed an interest in helping. What emerged was a group of about a dozen people who all contributed different elements of support—some quite substantial in material ways—but some were helpful in showing up for site visits, identifying possible grant opportunities, or just spreading the word in the community about the project. The idea of building a garden appealed to many groups of people not usually concerned with prison reform. The APFC benefitted from a strong contingent of wealthy white and Asian-American supporters on the outside.

One partnership was vital. No foundation would give directly to OSP so the APFC had to have a fiscal sponsor for all of its grant applications. Karn Saetang from the National Association of Korean American Service Consortium (NAKASEC) proved to be a crucial outside supporter. NAKASEC hosted an online donation page and served as the fiscal sponsor for all the APFC grants. Even when Saetang left his position at that organization, he continued supporting the grant writing, and NAKASEC's new director continued hosting donations to the Healing Garden Project at no cost.

Through connections with Willamette University, the APFC sought advice on messaging from a Communications professor and on grant writing from a professional grant writer. Those early feedback sessions proved useful and the club was rewarded with early success from the Social Justice Fund and the Oregon Community Foundation. Granting organizations were drawn to both the vision of the project and the community built around the project which broke down barriers between racial groups, between incarcerated residents and staff and between the prison system and the wider free community. The APFC treated every grant site visit as an opportunity to make a new friend and emphasized the importance of establishing a relationship, whether they were awarded a grant or not. This focus on building relationships through the whole process produced monetary success with even larger grants from the Spirit Mountain Community Fund and Meyer Memorial Trust. The relationship building was authentic, not just a means to an end, and many of those relationships have continued even when individuals left their positions at the foundations.

With the help of Saetang and NAKASEC, the Healing Garden Project also benefitted from increased media attention, especially after the first couple of grants came through so that success seemed more possible. Of critical importance was a professional news video created by *The Oregonian* that featured pictures from OSP

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and an interview with Cofer (Long, 2017). The increased attention brought in more individual donations and effectively spread the word about the Healing Garden Project. Other news outlets picked up the story, including NBC News which did a feature story (Truong, 2018). As with most projects, success beget success. What started the whole process however, was creating a community of supporters on the outside who were willing to champion the cause, raise attention, and create a network of fundraisers.

Although their endless campaign efforts and media attention contributed to their success, what moved the APFC most was gaining the trust from people outside of prison. Cofer described tangible (e.g. blueprint or agenda) and intangible (e.g. resilience, creativity, patience) assets that helped them gain trust from others. Such trust added credibility to their garden project. He marveled at the fact that he now counts college professors, prison staff, and a whole variety of community leaders as friends and colleagues – people, he said, “who had every right to fear me or despise me” (Cofer, 2020).

Sustaining a collaborative program is equally as challenging as building a partnership. Sometimes, community partnerships fall apart due to scarce resources or dependence on particular connections (Boghossian et al., 2012, p.32). Although Kurisu is the undeniable and most pivotal community contributor, various community organizations and individuals have kept fueling resources to the Healing Garden Project. Decentralized responsibilities and contribution methods seem to be a key for sustainability of community partnerships. As Boghossian et al. (2012, p. 32) point out, dissemination of collaborative efforts brings even stakeholders closer and helps the garden project continue after the construction was completed.

### **What The Garden Can Accomplish**

It is clear that the Healing Garden Project benefitted from a clear vision of the role of nature and gardens in transformative justice, promising to transform the individuals who participate in the garden *and* literally transforming the space of OSP.

Can the garden deliver on its promise to promote healing? As reviewed by Arimoto (2020), the roots of healing gardens can be traced back to the Middle Ages (Koschnitzki, 2011). Healing gardens were built for folk remedies by growing herbs earlier in history, but people began recognizing the therapeutic aspects of gardens in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Koschnitzki, 2011). Since then, this new discovery has been applied to different populations to improve existing conditions. Exposure to nature through various media appears to promote wellness of human-beings as a by-product of transformative justice.

Nature-Assisted Therapy (NAT), proposed by Wilson decades ago, was defined “as an intervention with the aim to treat, hasten recovery, and/or rehabilitate patients

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with a disease or a condition of ill health, with the fundamental principle that the therapy involves plants, natural materials, and/or outdoor environment, without any therapeutic involvement of extra human mammals or other living creatures” (Annerstedt & Währborg, 2011, p. 372). NAT includes broad applications to different individuals, instead of referring a particular therapeutic method. A more recent meta-analysis on the effects of NAT on human health shows consistent support for this method and concluded that NAT is a relevant public health resource for diverse populations (Annerstedt & Währborg, 2011). Arimoto (2020) listed findings in various research fields: “the exposure to nature reduces depression and anxiety (Clatworthy, Hinds, & Camic, 2013; McCaffrey, 2007), PTSD symptoms (Poulsen, Stigsdotter, & Refshage, 2015), and Alzheimer’s disease (Chapman, Hazen, & Noell-Waggoner, 2008; D’Andrea, Batavia, & Sasson, 2007), improved physical and behavioral symptoms (Cooper & Sachs, 2013; Goto et al., 2017; Goto et al., 2013; Kuo, 2015; University of Minnesota, n.d.; McCaffrey, 2007), and makes the recovery process faster (Ulrich, 1984). Additionally, learning horticultural has an impact on the quality of life for those in assisted living (Collins & O’Callaghan, 2008).”

Adult individuals in custody are likely to suffer mentally and emotionally during their incarceration; therefore, it is not surprising that the similar effects of NAT, including gardens, are observed in a prison setting. Although NAT has been used even in corrections, when it comes to “gardens” it is likely to include horticultural activities. For example, as Arimoto’s (2020) literature review indicates, Rice and Remy (1998) and Van Nes (2006) introduced an herb garden in a women’s prison; Lindemuth (2007) introduced prison gardens with different purposes from the architect perspectives. In addition, horticultural program such as vegetable gardening improves psychological and social functioning in jail (Rice & Remy, 1998). In-prison horticultural therapy mitigates vulnerability to drug addiction (Richards & Kafami, 1999), and there is evidence that gardens within the walls reduce stress among people who are incarcerated (Lindemuth, 2007). We know nature images improve behavioral issues in prison (Richards & Kafami, 1999), and nature video calms residents in solitary confinement and reduces the time spent in Intensive Management Unit (Nadkarni, et al., n.d.; Nadkarni, et al., 2017). Recidivism among participants of a horticultural (green house) program at Rikers Island Jail was significantly lower than those who did not participate in this program (Jiler, 2009). Therefore, regardless of the facility type in which studies were conducted, exposure to nature seems to offer promising outcomes.

Nearly four decades ago in Michigan, Moore (1981) examined how the prison environment affects residents’ well-being. According to Moore, the condition of the cell, including its location (interior or exterior), relative privacy, and noise level have an impact on residents’ physical health. Moore examined the frequency of sick calls to the infirmary to measure incarcerated people’s health. This research



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suggested that lack of privacy, lack of visual access to nature and the noise level affected incarcerated people's well-being (Moore, 1981, p. 29-32). Being deprived of privacy is inevitable for the incarcerated for the sake of everyone's safety. However, this leads the incarcerated to develop powerlessness and hopelessness, which in turn impedes rehabilitation. The Healing Garden can be one solution for getting out of a negative spiral. But a deliberate plan for use must be developed that includes the number of people who may use it at one time and the amount of time they may spend there. Nevertheless, as stated above, the structural design of the Japanese-style garden allows incarcerated people to enjoy solitude while remaining connected to their surroundings. This may be a temporary seclusion, but the availability and accessibility of such a quiet moment can bring emotional healing and rehabilitation, and make daily tasks performed by the staff easier (Arimoto, 2020).

Incarcerated people may not be physically injured, but should still be healed as they will likely experience significant mental and emotional distress while serving their time (Arimoto, 2020). Incarceration itself deprives individuals of many things we tend to take for granted such as privacy, liberty, goods and services, security, autonomy, and quiet time (Regoli, Hewitt, and Kosloski, 2018, p 225). This certainly affects people who are incarcerated and their well-being in many ways. While the public may think they are criminals and deserve any hardships in prison, what they are not fully aware of is the reality that the vast majority of prisoners will be released to rejoin local communities. Incarceration per se is punishment (Banks, 2012); therefore, we should not impose more pain on people who are incarcerated. We believe that healing is the key to reduce recidivism.

What we want to emphasize is not a by-product of the Healing Garden or Nature-Assisted Therapy. Rather, the process of garden construction was healing to many involved. As Zimbardo (1972) suggests, the prison environment fosters feelings of powerlessness and instills frustration, anger, and hatred, which in turn can lead to more violence. What we want instead is for more incarcerated people to receive and develop empathy, practice mentally and emotionally healthy healing and become whole again. Therefore, humane treatment and empowerment are essential for rehabilitation and successful re-entry, but the healing comes more from the process of purpose and belonging. Through the journey of garden construction, the involved incarcerated individuals perceived empowerment, competence, and connectedness to the outside world. Community partnerships encourage incarcerated people with hope by developing a sense of belonging which promotes mutual confidence and helps them expand the support system.

People face many challenges after being released. They must develop skills managing such challenges without getting themselves into trouble. Additionally, as Arimoto (2020) explains, those who have been involved in criminal behavior can hold "thinking errors" or thinking patterns such as Control (e.g. power hungry), Cognitive

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Immaturity (e.g. self-pitying), and Egocentrism (e.g. blaming others for one's own actions) (Mandracchia et al. 2007). Through an experience like the Healing Garden Project, involved residents will learn social skills, break the erroneous thinking patterns and eventually transform themselves for the better. Emotional healing is vital for successful reintegration into society and helps them develop a prosocial mindset. Therefore, not only the use of the Healing Garden but also the project itself is believed to be beneficial to those who are incarcerated for their positive self-transformation. The mission of corrections must be re-socializing people who have been convicted of crimes to become law-abiding neighbors and community members. Transformative justice embodied in the Healing Garden Project requires institutional receptivity and broad-based community partnerships, but it is a model for initiatives that can be repeated at other facilities to enhance the possibilities for transformation of both incarcerated people and prisons.

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**ENDNOTE**

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